

April – May, 2006 : Breaches, Bushels, Bird Flu and Beetles

Though battered and breached, California levees kept us from disaster this spring. An official at the [Department of Water Resources](#) (DWR) described the relentless rainfall as “one of the top-five weather seasons on record.” Although a major catastrophe was avoided, rising water levels once again point to the crucial importance of repairing our aging flood control infrastructure. Climate change is predicted to lead to higher rainfall and runoff in the future for Northern California. We need to prepare *now* for this new reality. CDFA’s temporary flood precautions web page provided links to weather forecast sites and [county emergency contact information](#) from the state [Office of Emergency Services](#).

Speaking of environmental issues, **“Let’s talk price per bushel, not per barrel.”** This new slogan for an auto manufacturer could also serve as a motto for California’s interest in the production of alternative fuels such as ethanol, bio-diesel and bio-methane, generated from crops and agricultural byproducts. This month I chaired a session of the Sixth Haagen-Smit Symposium in Aptos. The theme of this [Air Resources Board](#) conference was “The Future of Transportation Fuels: Environmental and Energy Aspects.” With [Executive Order S-06-06](#), Governor Schwarzenegger has mapped out an ambitious plan to have the state producing 20 percent of its bio-fuel needs by 2010. We can choose to continue the practices of the past “waste management century” or shift forward into a new era of full resource utilization. These poly-fuels hold the promise of fueling new industries in our state, providing additional employment opportunities, and reducing our dependence on foreign energy sources.

Also in terms of bushels, after a 10-year embargo, the first commercial shipment of California wheat has been exported to Mexico. In 1996, Mexico placed a ban on all California wheat exports after Karnal bunt fungus was found in limited areas of the desert southwest. Following a lengthy period of negotiation, the ban was lifted in 2005, through the efforts of the Mexican government and a public/private partnership consisting of CDFA, USDA, a team of California state legislators, members of the California congressional delegation, national wheat organizations, the [California Wheat Commission](#) and the California Association of Wheat Growers. Mexico imports 3.6 million metric tons of wheat a year, 80 percent of which comes from the U.S. With the California ban lifted, the state will again have the opportunity to offer wheat to this large export market.



Secretary Kawamura (middle, background) and other officials listen as Governor Schwarzenegger answers questions during a recent visit to the DWR Flood Operations Center. Photo: Dale Kolke / DWR



CDFA Undersecretary A.J. Yates, at the Adams Grain Elevator in Woodland, participated in the ceremonies marking the resumption of California wheat shipments to Mexico. Photo: J. Eddy / CDFA

I expect that increasing exports of California agriculture will be a topic of the listening sessions CDFA is sponsoring this July as part of our public outreach efforts for the [federal 2007 farm bill](#). CDFA will launch a new website soon that will enable public and industry participants to post farm bill comments online. A schedule for the listening sessions in your area will be distributed in June.



Dr. Annette Whiteford, DVM, Director of CDFA's Division of Animal Health and Food Safety Services, spoke during the recent avian flu workshop at CDFA headquarters. Photo: J. Van Rein / CDFA

We hosted a bird flu preparedness roundtable here at CDFA headquarters in late April. The workshop was attended by federal, state, county and municipal officials, as well as industry representatives and the media. Ongoing commercial biosecurity measures were described, along with the lessons learned from the successfully fought battle against exotic Newcastle disease of poultry. Coordination of the communication channels with our partners, at all levels of government, is essential, along with a regional plan to address bird flu. CDFA veterinary staff discussed the three populations at risk in this state: wild birds, domestic poultry and humans. Potential routes of disease introduction were identified as migratory flyways, contaminated material and smuggled live, infected birds. We will be involved in future [avian flu](#) meetings this year as the situation warrants.

Excluding harmful ag diseases and pests from the state remains one of CDFA's core competencies. Ongoing collaborations with USDA and county inspectors are critical to fulfilling our mission to protect the agriculture industry. An infestation of [diaprepes root weevil](#) was discovered recently in San Diego County and is now being eradicated. This exotic Caribbean beetle feeds on more than 270 species of plants and represents a great threat to the citrus and ornamental plant industries in California. Two other sites of weevil infestation, one in Newport Beach and one in Long Beach, are currently undergoing treatments to eliminate this beetle. Only by continuing vigilant pest exclusion, detection, eradication and control activities will our state be kept free of this and other major pests.

In closing, I want to congratulate the [County Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers of Weights and Measures](#) on their 125th anniversary. Their crucial collaborative role with CDFA helps protect our environment through pesticide management and pest exclusion activities, as well as ensuring a fair marketplace for all consumers.

As always, thank you for your support and don't hesitate to contact my office with any questions or concerns.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A.G. Kawamura".

A.G. Kawamura
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